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Megan Black, *The Global Interior: Mineral Frontiers and American Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018)

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Introduction by Melanie A. Kiechle, Virginia Tech

In *The Global Interior: Mineral Frontiers and American Power*, **Megan Black** digs deep into the Department of the Interior, revealing how this relic of the United States' nineteenth-century western expansion used minerals and the environment to become a global agency in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The book, which was honored with the ASEH's George Perkins Marsh Prize in 2019, explains both how the Department of the Interior created and expanded its mineral agenda and how grassroots social movements challenged Interior planners' ambitions. The interaction between the Interior Department's "satellites'-eye view" and the perspective of those at ground level concludes this book and prompts much of the lively conversation in this roundtable.

As a scholar focused on the global history of the frontier in the twentieth century, **Shellen X. Wu** appreciates Black's meticulous research and rich documentation of the continued quest for mineral resources throughout the Department of the Interior's frequent reinventions. Wu also notes that the Black's final chapter on the Council of Energy Resource Tribes, an indigenous coalition, is a "welcome break" from the Interior's imperial perspective. In this break, Wu glimpses alternative perspectives—not only to the Department of the Interior, but to Black's institutional focus. How else might we understand this history of resource development and imperialism by centering different actors?

Sarah Stanford-McIntyre finds "two exciting interventions" in *The Global Interior*: the insistence that resource development and extraction was central to US diplomatic history and the continuity of the institutional logic of empire across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. "Institutional logic" is a fascinating aspect of the book, as Black argues that the Department of Interior actively obscured the empire it built. As Stanford-McIntyre considers the government's strategic deployment of technical and scientific neutrality, she wonders who Interior's audiences were and how they reacted to such "neutrality theater." Furthermore, did individuals promote these policies or does institutional inertia explain the continuities in the Department of Interior's imperialism?

Mining historian **Brian Leech** also has questions about institutional logic, and about the agency of individuals within a sprawling government agency. In particular, Leech draws our attention to bureaus within the Department, such as the United States Geological Survey and the U.S. Bureau of Mines, wondering how employment in one bureau or another shaped the goals and actions of "Interior technocrats." While Leech hopes for more scholarship on these subjects, he applauds Black's engagement in settler colonialism theory and urges other mineral scholars to take up this productive line of inquiry.

Jacob Darwin Hamblin has also written extensively about American science and imperialism, and from this vantage point he applauds *The Global Interior's* "bold claim

about American power.” For Hamblin, Black’s deep analysis of one government institution, including the details of its bureaucracy, is a reminder that we cannot overlook the role of the state in any narratives of expansion, extraction, and capitalist exploitation. Even when championing scientific progress, economic development, or environmental redemption, the Department of the Interior did far more for and with U.S. corporations than for other countries or individuals living near “strategic minerals.” These issues lead Hamblin to ask Black about the use of cynicism in historical analysis, finding sincerity of environmental rhetoric, and materialist interpretations.

In her response, Megan Black not only answers each of the authors, but also addresses the different moments in which they wrote, spanning the Trump and Biden administrations. Black shares both the scholarship that shaped her perspectives when writing *The Global Interior* and newer works with which she now thinks about these issues. These insights are helpful and generative, adding richness to a book that already merits rereading. Readers also get an intriguing peek into Black’s new project, in which she will continue to balance many scales and perspectives of thinking about our more-than-human world.

Before turning to the first set of comments, I would like to pause here and thank all the roundtable participants for taking part. This roundtable’s timeline was disrupted, as were many other things, by the Covid-19 pandemic. I’m grateful to all of the participants for their volunteer labor, patience, and good cheer in this trying situation. Finally, I would like to remind readers that as an open-access forum, *H-Environment Roundtable Reviews* is available to scholars and non-scholars alike, around the world, free of charge. Please circulate.

Comments by Shellen X. Wu, Lehigh University

Shortly after Megan Black's book, *The Global Frontier*, was published in October 2018, in December of the same year, U.S. Department of Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke resigned under a cloud of scandal. He had been the subject of several federal investigations, including various ethics inquiries related to his ties to the fossil fuel industry. Zinke's push for aggressive deregulation of environmental rules, however, did not end with his tenure and continued under his successor, David Bernhardt, who had previously worked as a lobbyist for the oil industry. To the casual observer, the actions of the current leadership of the Interior Department, as the steward of conservation on roughly 500 million acres of public land, may appear blatantly at odds with its mission. Yet, Megan Black makes clear in her timely new work that far from an aberration, the Trump administration's use of the U.S. Department of Interior merely exposes tensions that had been present from its founding.

During the 170 years since its founding in 1849, the Department of Interior has undergone numerous changes to its institutional identity. Throughout, the quest for mineral resources has undergirded its core mission, from its original role overseeing the distribution of indigenous lands in the American West to a global reach in the post-World War II era of Pax Americana. Interior's programs have plumbed the depth of oceans and stretched upwards to outer space. The fact that few Americans seem aware of the scope of Interior's reach speaks to the success of its well-maintained façade as an agency of domestic policy.

Meticulously researched, the book's great insight is to draw out the various tensions implicit in the very nature of the term "interior" – its connotations of the domestic as opposed to foreign and the multiple meanings of frontier. Black details how the history of the Department of Interior was entangled from the very beginning with American imperial ambitions, starting with exploitation of natural resources on sovereign Indian territories in the American West. By mid-twentieth century, Secretary of Interior Stewart Udall undertook diplomatic missions to the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America, all part of American funded natural resource programs of international development. By making "visible a process by which environment itself became a means and logic of intervention," Black has written a breathtaking history of a branch of the U.S. federal government that has largely operated behind the scenes of an expansionist American agenda (8).

The frontier looms large over the history of the Department of Interior, from its founding by the U.S. Congress in 1849 tasked with the relentless subjugation and removal of indigenous peoples and the expropriation of tribal and Mexican lands. From the beginning, then, the Interior Department was part and parcel of American continental expansion. By century's end, the passage of the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887, otherwise known as the General Allotment Act, legally sanctioned the

dispossession of 90 million acres of indigenous lands (31). Shortly thereafter, the U.S. Census of 1890 confirmed the realization of Manifest Destiny.

When historian Frederick Jackson Turner declared the closure of the frontiers in 1893, the Department of Interior came to a crossroad with the end of its original mission. In the subsequent decades, the department's leaders redirected their expansionary energies outward. At the same time, the department reimagined the possibilities of the frontier from the westward push to a vertical drive into the interior of the Earth itself. The Interior Department founded the U.S. Geological Survey in 1879 and sponsored the investigation of minerals across the American West. By the turn of the century, American geologists followed American interests to the Philippines when the United States acquired the Asian territories in the Spanish-American War of 1898. As the survey and development of mineral resources became a central part of the Interior Department's mission, department employees offered their services to further American foreign interests.

In 1932, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Harold Ickes Secretary of Interior. Under his leadership, Interior reaffirmed its focus on the development of mining interests. Despite his best efforts, Ickes fought a losing battle to transfer Forest Service to Interior's control, as well as winning a skirmish with Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace for control of public grazing lands (59-60). Nevertheless, Interior failed to consolidate control over biological resources and retrenched to its strengths in mineral expertise. The Interior Department of the New Deal years oversaw both the Geological Survey and the Bureau of Mines.

In the years leading up to World War II, Ickes shaped U.S. oil policy both at home and abroad. (61) The formal outbreak of war only reinforced the importance of strategic minerals. At the meeting of the Pan American Union in May 1940 in Washington, D.C. President Roosevelt rolled out the Good Neighbor Policy. The Department of Interior became a key vehicle of enacting the policy, joining in the war effort to locate strategic minerals and aid in the development of resources in Latin American countries. Interior experts, including geologists and engineers, spanned across Central and South America, from Haiti and Costa Rica to Bolivia and Brazil, and compiled detailed reports on local conditions. These agents worked for Interior but also reported on the costs and conditions of development to mining industries back home (103).

The Department of Interior's global influence peaked in the post-war period as the foremost federal agency involved in the implementation of the Point Four program of technical assistance for developing countries. Black writes that, "At the genesis of America's international development mission, the Interior Department spearheaded a quest for minerals across participating nations in the Third World" (118). In this effort, as during the war, agency experts worked closely with American industry and private interests, providing critical intelligence and reports, all at the American taxpayers' expense (137).

Similarly, in the 1960s, the federal government, with the essential support of the Interior Department, underwrote the costs of offshore extraction and extended American territorial control to the underseas continental shelf. The direct beneficiaries of these efforts were corporations that snatched up off-shore drilling rights. Just as quickly, the environmental costs of this cozy arrangement between state and industry became clear. On January 28, 1969, an oil well operated by Union Oil sprung a leak, ultimately spilling around 3.2 million gallons of oil in the seas six miles off the coast of Santa Barbara, California and devastating the wildlife and ecosystem of the coastal region (177). In the search for the next open frontiers, Interior worked with NASA to launch the Landsat program in 1972. The detailed satellite surveys, it turns out, benefited most the repressive regimes of Third World Countries like Indonesia, Iran, and Chile, which supported the interests of American corporations in oil and mining (204).

The last chapter of the book provides a welcome break from the Interior Department's perspective to examine the efforts of an indigenous coalition, the Council of Energy Resource Tribes (CERT), headed by the Navajo tribal chairman Peter MacDonald. For a brief window from the late 1970s to the early 1980s, CERT and MacDonald's showmanship skills, including inviting the help of OPEC consultants, threatened to force Interior's agenda into retreat. What MacDonald brought to the nation's attention is the way indigenous peoples were grossly disadvantaged in negotiations with private energy companies. As the agency originally tasked with the dispossession of native lands, not surprisingly, Interior oversaw the terms of leases that offered little financial benefit to Indian tribes while saddling them with the environmental costs of mineral exploitation. Although CERT accomplished many of its goals, including the renegotiation of mineral leases, by 1983, the organization closed its Washington, D.C. offices. MacDonald eventually went to prison on corruption charges on the Navajo Reservation (242).

The chapter on CERT offers a glimpse of some alternative perspectives to Black's narrative. Both the power and the one weakness of the book comes from her singular focus on the Interior Department and its remarkable success in executing an American imperial agenda largely from the shadows. The response of the Navajo and other tribes, however, points to significant pushback from those on the other side of this agenda. Repressive regimes like Iran accepted the Faustian bargain Interior offered but were hardly hoodwinked by the language of mutual aid – until, that is, they were swept away by domestic uprisings, the unleashed forces of their own interiors.

Comments by Sarah Stanford-McIntyre, University of Colorado Boulder

In her provocative book, *The Global Interior*, Megan Black assesses a central paradox at the heart of twentieth-century American identity: a widespread cognitive disconnect between the United States' purported distaste for empire and its simultaneous expansion of economic power and influence around the globe. To explain one reason why Americans might not see their own empire, Black provides a history of the Department of the Interior's mining, mapping, and mineral development programs that bridges the temporal and topical divide between the history of extractive colonialism in the US West and American global hegemony.

Over the course of seven chapters, Black tracks the Department of the Interior's often-overlooked international resource development projects and compares them to similar domestic efforts. She begins in the nineteenth century with the founding of the Department of the Interior after the Mexican American War and the sudden expansion of US territorial holdings. Over the next three chapters, Black follows Interior mineral development projects in territorial Alaska, the Caribbean, South America, and the Middle East to show how American anxiety over resource dependence helped spur international development policy. In her later chapters, Black tracks similarities between battles over mineral rights on the US Continental Shelf and efforts to use global satellite imaging technology in mineral development. She ends in the 1970s with Native American efforts to wrest control over Reservation energy resources.

Taken together, this project makes two exciting interventions. First, it positions resource development and the capitalist logic of extractivism as central to US diplomatic history. Second, it reveals how little the institutional logic of empire actually changed between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. To do this, Black identifies clear parallels between seemingly disconnected periods in the history of the Department of the Interior: its early history as a vehicle for Indian Removal, its resource conservation work in the early twentieth century, and mid-century efforts to secure "strategic" resources abroad. Crucially, Black argues that for over 150 years the Department of the Interior was engaged in a consistent program of not just *building* empire, but also of *actively obscuring* it. She sees the success of such obfuscation as based in Interior's seemingly apolitical focus on mineral discovery and extraction.

In *The Global Interior*, analysis of patterns of thought and belief are threaded within a narrative of policy change and technological development. One of Black's key narrative threads is Interior's deployment of geologists and other experts across the globe. She argues that through the trappings of science the Department of the Interior, "eventually garnered an appearance of technical and scientific neutrality that disguised its outward disposition."¹ Black sees this perception of neutrality as

¹ Black, *Global Interior*, 11.

intended to expand American economic control without producing anti-colonial opposition. To make this argument, Black employs an impressive archival array including internal messages, reports, and news releases. While the presence and motivation for such obfuscation is well supported, I would like more information about the audience for this neutrality theater. Black identifies instances of internal ambivalence and some pushback against Interior using government funding and technology on behalf of private industry. However, I would like a clearer sense of what the political picture looked like in the region's Interior explored – both foreign and domestic. Based on the evidence provided, it seems that Interior was most concerned with reassuring themselves and the Euro-American public that, first, America had no interest in empire and second, the government was not subsidizing industry. Reassuring other nations of its good intentions seems to be a distant institutional priority.

This said, the shifting relationship between the US government and American industry is as the heart of this story. Black convincingly characterizes Interior's mineral exploration as paving the way for US economic expansion – and ultimately paving the way for neoliberal globalization at the end of the century. Throughout the book, Black tracks ebbing and flowing tension and cooperation between government agents and industry leaders. However, she identifies much of this as largely performative, in particular identifying mutual anger over environmental contamination as “sleight of hand” and “ritual finger pointing.”² Further illustrating this point, Black demonstrates that, time and again, US mining companies would only get on board with foreign operations if the US government literally paved the way for them with infrastructure building and reconnaissance projects. Such examples viscerally remind us how very blurry the line was between Cold War diplomacy and the desires of American extractive industry. The fact that this intentional relationship was actively obscured indicates just how important the maintenance of ideological and rhetorical fictions were to the American Cold War project.

Such a narrative leaves the reader with a chicken-or-the-egg conundrum: who or what exactly is pushing this policy agenda forward? Presidents? Institutional leaders? The whims of American mining and oil giants? Black begins to answer this question by identifying Harold Ickes and Stuart Udall as key shapers of Interior Department expansion. She carefully identifies a desire to maintain and expand institutional relevance as a driving force behind, first, Interior's foray into resource conservation and national park development and then, second, into international mineral exploration. She backs this up with a discussion of the turf wars between Interior and the military, the Department of Agriculture, and other federal agencies. This discussion has significant implications for how we understand the trajectory and development of federal policy, suggesting that institutional inertia and desire for self-preservation have played an uncomfortably large role in the trajectory of sweeping policy trends. More broadly, fully acknowledging such concerns seems to imply a grimly self-serving impetus for the development and expansion of American empire.

² Black, *Global Interior*, 10.

Put another way, if we take institutional inertia as a key driver of policy, does this reveal a greater element of accident or thoughtlessness in American empire building? Or in the more recent slides towards neoliberalism and reactionary populism?

Ultimately, the longest lasting impact of Interior's Cold War empire building will be its spotty environmental record and legacy of extractive destruction. This is a topic that received less attention in the book. The environment lurks at the edges of Black's narrative, coming to the forefront at brief moments such as in a discussion of the Santa Barbara oil spill and then fading again as policy trajectories once again rise to the fore. However, Black provides an interesting discussion of how Interior deployed two environmental ideologies to justify American extractive control. According to Black, the first, "resource globalism" argues that geology knows no political borders and therefore resource stewardship must be a collective human responsibility. The second, "resource primitivism" argues that Native American tribes and Third World governments are unequipped to effectively manage their own resources and therefore require help. Black sees these ideologies as slowly chipping away at post-World War II respect for the sovereignty of all nations.³ Black's discussion of how these ideas were strategically deployed begs for further scholarship on the complicated relationships between environmentalism and the rise of neoliberal globalism.

The book is tightly argued with little extra verbiage or unnecessary narrative. However, there are two places I would argue further elaboration would have been ideal. First, while I was excited to see a chapter on the federal acquisition of offshore mineral rights, I was looking for greater discussion of the battle between individual states and the federal government over territory. This is an under-studied but very important moment in American political history. Black gestures towards this – provocatively linking this controversy to nineteenth century state's rights debates -- and then moves on. I would be very curious to see to what degree Interior and the federal government deployed a similar mix of paternalism and calls for universal resource stewardship to justify seizure. Second, throughout the book, the underlying catalyst for the move toward soft diplomacy – and the rise of Interior as a political player – is a global distaste for direct imperial interventions and the waves of anti-imperial grassroots and indigenous sovereignty movements during the second half of the twentieth century. Black alludes to these efforts throughout the book and she does addresses specifically Native American pushback against Interior in her final chapter. However, I wanted to hear more. For example, adding a chapter on uranium mining on public lands would have foregrounded native resistance earlier in the book and only furthered the connections between US Indian policy and twentieth century empire.

All final quibbles aside, this is a great book. In *The Global Interior*, Megan Black has deftly mined (pun intended) a rich and long-overlooked institutional archive to demonstrate remarkable coherence in institutional policy, rhetoric, and directive

³ Black, *Global Interior*, 131.

across geographic locations and institutional leadership. This book is well-researched and well-argued and provides a refreshing and creative realignment of subfields. More broadly, it forces the reader to wrestle with the legacy of American global dominance while simultaneously asking us to address still unanswered questions about how institutions and economies might shape the resource economies of our future.

Comments by Brian Leech, Augustana College

Megan Black's excellent book, *The Global Interior*, takes another look at U.S. global expansionism, with diplomacy, conservation, and a massive, often unwieldy, government organ all serving as foci. The book also fits in, nurtures, and goes beyond a number of trends in the environmental history of extractive industries. I used to assume that books about mineral resources—whether in mining or energy—would be overlooked by the powers that be in favor of what once were the main topics for environmental historians: forests, parks, water, and other pretty things that people tend to ruin with pollution. The field has since course corrected in a major way. Starting a little over a decade ago, some of the best environmental histories have centered on minerals. Kathryn Morse's *The Nature of Gold*, Thomas G. Andrews' *Killing for Coal*, Timothy LeCain's *Mass Destruction*, and Liza Piper's *The Industrial Transformation of Subarctic Canada* became the leading edge of a wave of books about the cultures, systems, and communities of mineral extraction.⁴ Some of those later books, like Brian C. Black's *Crude Reality* and the two edited volumes, *Mining North America* and *A Global History of Gold Rushes*, have reminded historians about these industries' worldwide scale.⁵

Megan Black's book certainly fits these trends. It encourages a more transnational history of extraction. It examines the inequality connected to these extractive cultures—with the benefits and pain distributed quite unequally based on race, socio-economic class, and place. It shows the often close cooperation between private corporations and government. Yet *The Global Interior* provides new twists to these themes by investigating how the United States government expanded its global power through one "key mechanism": the Department of the Interior (4).

The *Global Interior* starts with a clever idea—that the Department of the Interior was often a Department of the Exterior. In Black's convincing narrative, the Department of the Interior served as a benevolent face to American imperialism. Sometimes its technocrats promised to help other nations in mineral development, but their actions instead benefited U.S. corporations. At other times it sought to make the U.S. more self-sufficient in energy, but in doing so, caused just as many problems through leasing lands on both Indian Reservations and into the ocean, on North America's continental shelf. Black begins the book by tracking the Department of the Interior's origins in enacting the "humdrum of settler colonialism," including its work parceling

⁴ Kathryn Morse, *The Nature of Gold: an Environmental History of the Klondike Gold Rush* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003); Thomas G. Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Timothy J. LeCain, *Mass Destruction: The Men and Giant Mines That Wired America and Scarred the Planet* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009); Liza Piper, *The Industrial Transformation of Subarctic Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010).

⁵ Brian C. Black, *Crude Reality: Petroleum in World History* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012); John Robert McNeill, George Vrtis, eds., *Mining North America: An Environmental History since 1522* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017); Benjamin Mountford and Stephen Tuffnell, eds., *A Global History of Gold Rushes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018).

land, containing indigenous peoples, and mapping resources across North America in the 19th century (18). The book then tracks the Department's role in searching both U.S. territories and Latin America for strategic minerals during World War II as well as its similar role in international "assistance" programs across the Cold War world.

What might surprise some readers is the focus of two of the book's later chapters on well-loved Department Secretary, Stewart Udall. Udall has long been revered as a hero of the U.S. environmental movement, but here we see him struggling to balance his interests in environmental protection with his department's long-term goal: to procure mineral wealth. Udall's major role in dramatically expanding oil leases for off-shore drilling seems particularly surprising. Udall also appears in the early promotion of what became the Landsat satellite—a satellite launched in 1972 to aid third world countries, supposedly helping them to manage their own natural resources. The Landsat instead proved more likely to help U.S. companies in their attempts to gain a foothold in new places, as Chevron did in using Landsat images to initiate an oil rush to the Sudan in 1977.

Like Udall himself, the Department of the Interior clearly struggled to balance its promotion of natural resource extraction with its more public role in environmental protection. Its failure to properly manage offshore drilling became apparent in the 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill, for instance. Many American Indians also fought back against Interior's attempt to lease tribal lands for energy development during the 1970s, while the inhabitants of the global South used the post-colonial movement to protest the strategic minerals search that often lay at the heart of U.S. power abroad. *The Global Interior* ends with the Department broken down and broken up. The Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Energy took over many of Interior's earlier roles.

Sometimes the broad brushstrokes in Black's wide-ranging story can obscure the specifics. Outside of major political appointees, the people from Interior whom we meet serve as the geological arm of projects that often involve other federal departments. Key players include specialists from either the United States Geological Survey or the U.S. Bureau of Mines. Those two bureaus, although important members of the Department of the Interior, have their own distinct histories, but we don't learn much specifically about either one, as their members sometimes get subsumed under the blanket title of Interior technocrat. It's hard to fault Black for this effect, though, as often the people she discusses aren't acting specifically as agents of one bureau or another. Since we still don't have comprehensive, analytical written histories of either the Bureau of Mines or the USGS (outside of those written by the bureaus' own historians), Black provides a valuable service.

Readers similarly do not learn much about the results of Interior's surveys on the ground. We get tantalizing tidbits from department personnel about different mining projects started due to their geological recommendations, but we don't frequently learn many specifics about the projects or hear the voices of people affected by those projects, except for in the final chapter, when the book discusses the Council of Energy

Resources Tribes, which in the 1970s joined tribal leaders who were upset at the unfair distribution of monies from energy production. I again don't see this concern as significant, as Black needs to maintain focus on the Department itself. Hopefully others will be able to discuss in more detail what U.S. mineral exploration looked like on the ground and what happened after surveyors left.

What can historians of mining and energy learn from *The Global Interior*? Minerals scholars can certainly do more to engage in settler colonialism theory. Black does a fine job connecting the Department of the Interior's early focus on colonizing the American West with its later goal to find "virgin" mineral lands and new energy "frontiers" abroad. Black helps readers to understand how "resource primitivism"—a view that "primitive" peoples poorly manage their own resources (and therefore need supervision)—emerged out of the department's experience in the American West (p. 99). *The Global Interior* should also encourage those who study major mineral finds to be more careful about to whom they ascribe a discovery. International networks and state-directed surveys often initiate resource booms, even if government assistance sometimes gets erased in favor of pioneering prospectors or evil corporate leaders.

Minerals scholars should also do more to interconnect the histories of energy and mining. Black suggests that administrators and geologists often thought about minerals that make energy and minerals that don't at the same time. The topics of energy security and strategic minerals shared similar goals, approaches, and results (and extend back in history as concepts, long before anyone used those actual terms, as Peter A. Shulman has shown).⁶ When the Department of Energy formed in 1977, though, the "mineral technocracy" was split up. In the field of history, we too have seemingly split up into two separate literatures: one in energy history and one in mining history. Energy history, for instance, maintains a "petromyopia" in Christopher F. Jones' words—focusing mostly on oil.⁷ However, a convincing case could be made that not only should the history of coal mining fit under energy history, but so should copper mining, as people have long used copper to conduct electrical currents.

In other words, I hope that *The Global Interior* will gain a broad readership, particularly amongst energy and mining historians, who will surely benefit from this global look at "mineral frontiers."

⁶ Peter A. Shulman, *Coal and Empire: the Birth of Energy Security in Industrial America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).

⁷ Christopher F. Jones, "Petromyopia: Oil and the Energy Humanities," *Humanities* 5, no. 2 (2016): 36.

Comments by Jacob Darwin Hamblin, Oregon State University

“Just an Innocent Secretary of the Interior”

The Department of the Interior had more than its proverbial fifteen minutes of fame in the 1920s, when Secretary Albert Fall was sent to prison for taking bribes from rich oil prospectors. That scandal, associated with the oil reserves in Teapot Dome, Wyoming, now stands as a footnote of history in the otherwise forgettable administration of Warren G. Harding. But for Megan Black, in her excellent book *The Global Interior*, the scandal was less an aberration and more a symptom of the cozy relationship between Interior (the department) and the mineral industry. Though it has a reputation for federal regulation and control, Interior has been the key facilitating instrument of capitalist exploitation of the nation's mineral wealth. And when we recall that the Department of the Interior was born in the wake of the Mexican American War to oversee the development of vast western territories, it is no far stretch to imagine the department as a quasi-colonial body. And what about the rest of the world? As the title of the book suggests, Black has offered us a history that reveals Interior with ambitions for exploiting mineral wealth all over the planet.

The Global Interior is a potent example of what can be accomplished when a thoughtful scholar with wide-ranging interests conducts a deep analysis of an institution—including seemingly menial details of bureaucracy—and connects it to fundamental questions of power around the world. Black is both a sharp historian and a talented storyteller, and she conveys fluency with numerous literatures including environmental history, history science, indigenous studies, and international diplomacy. Not only that, her book manages to feel not at all like the story of a government department, but instead like a provocative environmental history of the United States as it engaged with indigenous peoples at home and with foreign governments abroad.

The book makes a bold claim about American power that should compel us to reintegrate the role of the state in any narratives about expansion, extraction, and capitalist exploitation. While we may imagine that the idea of the frontier or the economic momentum of private enterprise animated westward expansion, we also should recognize the central importance of a “machinery of governance dedicated to managing and extending it.” Megan Black wants us to see the Department of the Interior as a “key mechanism for ensuring and obscuring the projection of American power in the world,” including settler colonialism at home and efforts to meddle in other countries' affairs (4). At times, mostly in the introduction and epilogue, she seems too focused on the goal of convincing us that Interior was a key animator at “every meaningful threshold of US expansionism,” as if still justifying the attention she gives it. Perhaps this seemed necessary but to my mind, she had me riveted as soon as she laid out the connection between resource extraction at home and abroad, highlighting longstanding tensions between Interior and more traditional instruments of state power such as the State Department. Black delivers a book that

showcases subtle forms of power and influence, using knowledge, measurement, and expertise—along with a stated commitment to progress—to extend influence while serving national and corporate interests.

Black's main claim is that the Department of the Interior's management of minerals enabled and encouraged American expansionism writ large. She notes that Interior typically saw itself pushing against a terrestrial frontier rather than a territorial one, recognizing no national boundaries in its efforts to understand the locations and economic promise of the earth's petroleum, copper, tin, rare earths, and myriad other minerals. It surveyed, mapped, and conducted scientific research to understand such resources and thus opened up paths of exploitation by American capitalists not only at home but in overseas territories such as the Philippines and Alaska, and foreign countries such as those in Latin America. And while Interior did play a role in curbing unrestricted capitalism through federal regulations, Black shows us a long history of public-private collusion that benefited corporations far more than it ever restricted them, and that often resulted in hideous consequences for indigenous peoples or developing countries. The most notorious example of outright corruption was the Teapot Dome scandal, but even after the department tried to clean up his reputation in the 1930s, its mission to identify and manage exploitation of minerals put it directly in collaboration with mining and drilling interests.

One of the basic tensions in Black's narrative is Americans' discomfiture with its own empire. Like other recent historical scholarship—such as Daniel Immerwahr's *How to Hide an Empire*—Black draws parallels to other colonial empires where previous generations of scholars have tried to highlight differences.⁸ From the outset, Interior was designed to oversee not only minerals but people, managing Native American tribes through the Bureau of Indian affairs, while finding means of extracting resources. It lost control of agriculture and wildlife—what Black calls biological resources—to other government entities, and in its struggle to survive it asserted a place as the “natural resource” body, ignoring any notion of sticking to US borders. Where *The Global Interior* excels is in revealing how expansionists tried to square their own beliefs in Americans' unique experiences (or American exceptionalism, to use an older phrase) with their own imperialist actions. Ironically, some of the greatest resisters of imperialism were Interior officials such as journalist and politician Ernest Gruening and Interior Secretary Harold Ickes, who saw themselves as champions of equality among nations. Gruening loathed the brutal racism of Belgian Congo, but then worked for Interior to manage Alaska, only to conclude that the United States also had fallen into racial exploitation of indigenous people. During the administration of President Franklin Roosevelt, Interior Secretary Harold Ickes tried to implement his boss's “Good Neighbor” policy toward Latin America, embracing cooperation rather than military intervention. Interior sent geologists there to conduct surveys, ostensibly for the benefit of home governments, but arming American corporations with deep knowledge about the locations and extent of

⁸ Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019).

mineral wealth. These cooperative projects were meant to provide knowledge for all, but Interior was reluctant to share the details freely, and during World War II it found the ultimate justification to keep them secret—these were “strategic minerals,” after all.

The aftermath of World War II amplified these same contradictions. The United States found itself speaking out against colonialism, but had acquired in a war with Japan an immense amount of space in the Pacific, including the Marshall Islands, where it soon began testing atomic bombs. Its territories of Alaska and Hawaii would disappear as colonies in the postwar era when they became states, but Interior would still seek to develop resources elsewhere. Black shows us how Harry Truman’s Point Four plan—purportedly an aid to economic development—was designed in part to send technicians abroad to conduct scientific surveillance, to continue existing practices of resource exploitation without the trappings of formal colonialism. Black shows us how Truman also asserted US claims over the continental shelf, that part of the continent hidden offshore underneath the ocean. It was a huge land grab, and hardly anyone noticed.

The Department of the Interior’s efforts to expand American mineral wealth made it an important collaborator in numerous technological developments. It often did so in the name of advancing science and, more often than not, clothed in the rhetoric of public good, economic development, or (after the 1960s) environmental redemption. Black has little patience for such rhetoric and routinely shows us how empty these promises were. One example is offshore oil prospecting and drilling, where she draws a direct line between Interior Secretary Stewart Udall’s machinations to parcel-out and lease the continental shelf—which had generated nearly \$1.5 billion in royalties in 1968—to the Santa Barbara oil spill of 1969. Interior also supported Landsat, the artificial satellite program designed to surveil the world from space, supposedly for research and for a better understanding of the earth, but mainly for corporations to understand where to focus their prospecting. In the late 1970s, data from Landsat sparked an oil rush in Sudan led by Chevron, and Black minces no words about how she interprets it, saying that the oil industry was the fulcrum point of unrest in the country, feeding a civil war, “which saw political repression, widespread famine, and scorched-earth campaigns. The use of Landsat to spur extraction in Sudan fell far short of the promises to improve conditions in developing nations—to yield global and environmental good” (208). Despite these travesties, Interior maintained a reputation as a body that reined in excesses, using scientific knowledge for the public good. At one point Black describes such portrayals “as a funhouse mirror image of its nineteenth-century self,” focused on extraction and collusion with industry, while depicting itself as a protector of the public trust (154).

Overall Megan Black is more judicious in her historical narrative than my above description might make it appear. She is not determined to criticize every move made by the department, and indeed she is sympathetic to some of her actors, particularly those she perceives as attempting to balance ideals, such as the two long-serving secretaries, Harold Ickes and Stewart Udall. Yet she is unwavering in her conclusion

that the United States was bent on expansionism, fed by capitalist exploitation and, enabled and encouraged by the state—through the Department of the Interior. What comes across as most disturbing is not the capitalist exploitation, the imperialism, or the corruption—surely we are used to reading about that!—but rather the obscurity of the instrument. Stewart Udall could travel the Middle East and claim to be an innocent Secretary of the Interior, and draw less attention than a diplomat or military figure. He could lean on geologists and other scientists for detached advice and insist that he operated in the greater good. Which brings me to some questions for Megan Black, in this roundtable:

First, I wondered how Black felt about Interior's deployment of ecological arguments, as when Interior officials emphasized the web of life, or the global commons. "For all the portrayals of global harmony," Black writes on p. 164, Interior's activities in the 1960s dovetailed with mineral development, and were a "catalyst of environmental degradation." This framing sets Interior up as a dishonest actor that used environmental arguments when it suited, often in ways in direct contradiction to its stated aims. I don't disagree, but I read this as a kind of "they say this but they intend that" framing, as if environmental goals, when sincere, can only serve positive purposes. Can we not also say that environmental rhetoric, particularly as it encouraged thoughtful citizens to think globally and act locally, enabled just the kind of global mindset that served US interests? After all, one point of this book is that Interior thought about terrestrial rather than territorial frontiers, which feels expansionistic and imperialistic. Would Black be willing to frame environmental rhetoric similarly?

Second, in a similar vein: in a book that is rife with cynical interpretations, I found that it occasionally was not cynical enough when it came to describing Interior's goals abroad. Black states that Udall was in the Middle East "ostensibly" to discuss desalination programs to provide water to parched areas. While I am thoroughly persuaded that Udall was there in part to discuss petroleum deals with Saudi Arabia and others, I was less persuaded that desalination was simply a ruse to obscure US interests in oil. Udall's role in promoting desalination was also tied to use of state power in the Middle East. Though not mentioned in the book, Udall and Atomic Energy Commission Glenn Seaborg were enthusiastic supporters of desalination plants operated on energy supplied by nuclear reactors. As with the narrative in much of Black's book, Interior (here allied with the AEC) found itself contributing to a major foreign policy initiative—President Johnson's "Water for Peace"—that had multiple aims, not the least of which was asserting leverage over Israel's nuclear program. State Department officials did not always agree with that aim (or find it realistic), but it stands as another example of Interior's involvement in foreign policy in unexpected ways. I don't wish to make too much of this point, except to say that sometimes the "environmental" goal is itself deeply entrenched in the extension of state power abroad.

Third, because so much of the book's focus is on the long-serving Democrats Harold Ickes and Stewart Udall, I wondered if Megan Black might expand her discussion of

Reagan's Secretary of the Interior, James Watt. We know that Reagan's strategy for killing agencies he did not like (such as the Environmental Protection Agency) was not to dismantle them but to starve them, depriving them of funding through budgetary means. Like Reagan, Watt felt that the public lands should be the states' responsibilities, and during the 1980s we saw the power of Interior weaken, through budgetary means. It is clear from Black's narrative that some Native American tribes thought, in vain, that they would get a better deal under Reagan. But what are we to make of Interior's role as an instrument abroad? Certainly the quest for mineral dominance around the world was just as important during the Reagan era, so what can we say about the role of Interior abroad, as it was being gutted from within? I was craving some kind of statement from Black about how the expansionist, capitalist-enabling Department of Interior fared under Reagan. Perhaps the tensions between the Interior and industry were more substantial than Black lets on, enough so for Reagan to want it to be hobbled.

My curiosity about Reagan leads me to a final query. I see Megan Black pushing back against those who see cultural or intellectual ideas animating American expansion (the notion of the frontier, Manifest Destiny, or American exceptionalism, to list just three ideas), and instead putting forward a more materialist interpretation that unites capitalism and state power. It is almost as if tectonic forces are at work, once the "machinery of governance" is in play. She spends considerable time showing us how different individuals (Ickes, for example) struggled in vain with the inherent contradictions of being against imperialism while also extracting resources abroad, and it seems like she is suggesting a process of intellectual justification for forces that are beyond their control. And yet she also suggests at some point that the US might have behaved differently, as Canada did when farming responsibilities for resource development out to the provinces. Let me play devil's advocate and suggest that this is what Reagan and Watt wanted, to defang Interior and let the states manage their lands. As this is a roundtable I may be forgiven a cheeky counterfactual question: had mineral management been transferred to the states after, say, the Teapot Dome scandal, how would the United States have operated differently? I ask this question partly with tongue-in-cheek because it is impossible to answer. But because the marriage of federal power and private interests are such an important aspect of Black's understanding of American expansion, I would be curious to read at least some ruminations.

Let me close on a positive note by reiterating that I thoroughly enjoyed reading Megan Black's prose and analysis, and I learned an extraordinary amount from her book. I recently attended the Cascadia Environmental History Collaborative, a retreat of faculty and graduate students in the Pacific Northwest. This year we met at Mount Hood and planned a hike on the Pacific Crest Trail. Our task was to pack with us the book we read this year that might change the way we think and teach about environmental history, and to speak about its merits with other participants. I normally pack by weight, but this year I unhesitatingly hauled my heavy hardbound copy of *The Global Interior* with me to the mountain, so I could pass it around.

Response by Megan Black, MIT

It was incredibly generative to engage with the comments of four distinguished readers, Shellen X. Wu, Sarah Stanford-McIntyre, Brian Leech, and Jacob Darwin Hamblin. As a group, they drew out key lessons from the US Department of the Interior's global mineral pursuits, including its potential to help reintegrate the state in "narratives about expansion, extraction, and capitalist exploitation" (Hamblin), trace a "transnational history of extraction" marked by unequal distributions of "benefits and pain" along categories of race, class and place (Leech), and highlight continuities of the "institutional logic of empire" across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Stanford-McIntyre). And they frequently observed how this far-flung history helped, at the time of its publication, to situate the Trump administration's freewheeling use of the Interior Department to further extractive ends as "far from an aberration" and instead an extension of the "tensions that had been present from its founding" (Wu). These reviewers also offered distinct and illuminating interpretations that helped me look anew on Interior's mineral pursuits. In so doing, they opened productive horizons for continued attention, interpretation, and inquiry. This is the very best of outcomes from the review process, and I am grateful both for the opportunity to think with the readers' provocative framings, challenges, and questions and for the overall curation of the forum by the H-Environment editors.

As one starting point, the readers all raised relevant questions about historical methods, including about the relationship between material processes and ideas in social transformation. Hamblin frames this problem nicely in relation to the literature on the history of US expansionism that oscillates between offering interpretations rooted in cultural ideologies, such as the frontier and Manifest Destiny (with Amy Kaplan's work illustrating this broader trend), and materially grounded interpretations (the Wisconsin school headed by William Appleman Williams).⁹ My project represents more of a merger of the two streams than might first appear. In fact, my moment of encounter with the problem of Interior's "exterior" activities was inextricable from the realm of cultural production: I encountered films with titles like *Evolution of the Oil Industry* and *A Story of Copper* produced by the Interior Department that constructed global visions of US mineral supremacy—a way of imagining the world beyond US sovereignty as always already deficient in their understanding of minerals' proper value and purpose. That seemed odd. Why would the insular Interior Department fixate on a world historical perspective in telling the "story" of minerals? Textual records at NARA provided some hints, revealing that these films circulated *overseas* in the 1950s. Why? Because Interior *personnel* circulated overseas as part of U.S. international development programs in the Cold War. In short, the films showed a decidedly global vision of the seemingly insular

⁹ Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of US Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1973).

department. The narratives helped legitimize its increasingly global portfolio. Ideological and material processes converged.

In investigating this intersection, I came to see Interior officials' ideas cohering in recurring claims about nature, eventually claims about *environment*, that rationalized expansion in neutral terms. Stanford-McIntyre asks about "audience" for these environmental logics, or what she aptly calls "neutrality theatre." I concluded that Interior's imagined audience was contingent, changing over time. At times, Interior officials invoked environmental logics to justify US presence to foreign audiences. Stewart Udall framed his 1967 tour in the Middle East to the Arab press as an "innocent" natural resource management affair (implication: unrelated to politicized oil interests). Yet Interior officials' arguments were more often part of a broader process of legitimation. The department, akin to other federal machineries from the Department of Defense to Federal Bureau of Investigation, justified actions for American citizens and officials in order to assure its budget. Interior personnel expressed a desire to prove continued relevance, championing their skillset and offering it up in ever-widening contexts, including in the oceans and outer space. This transfer of skills often seemed both natural and good.

Was this company line cynical or sincere, or both? Hamblin incisively asks this question, especially as it related to the deployment of ecological arguments concerning the web of life, or the global commons. In the end, I viewed recourse to ecological visions as less overt dissembling than a kind of rationalization within reach that could ennoble actions that had come to be seen as problematic, including US interventions overseas. Udall is a figure who showcases the different impulses and gradations of environmental thinking. Udall, as Leech points out, maintains a reputation in the historiography tied to more celebrated environmental achievements in a domestic context. Udall's complicated visions wove together at times competing impulses around aesthetic, pragmatic, and systematic approaches to nonhuman nature. He could celebrate ecological webs linking polar bears to American citizens even while promoting environmentally dubious but economically practical offshore oil drilling. Udall came to regret such contradictory drives. In the wake of the Santa Barbara Oil spill, Udall felt personally responsible because he had overseen an offshore leasing bonanza in the continental shelf there (and here, Stanford-McIntyre helpfully reminds us there is an important story some scholars, including Daniel Margolies, have generatively told about states' role therein).¹⁰ Udall seemed genuinely shocked over the extent to which one of his agendas (oil extraction) could so directly damage the other (ecological balance), in spite of overseeing research about oil spills' potential harms to sensitive marine environments. At other times, Udall clearly cited environment as more of an explicit smokescreen, as when he and Khrushchev claimed to have discussed hydroelectric dams, rather than reveal the most pressing contents of their conversation: intelligence that would prompt the Cuban Missile Crisis. For Udall, environmental recourse was most often sincere, at

¹⁰ Daniel Margolies, "Jurisdiction in Offshore Submerged Lands and the Significance of the Truman Proclamation in Postwar US Foreign Policy," *Diplomatic History* 44, no. 3 (June 2020): 447-465.

times strategic. A similar pattern emerges when analyzing the rhetoric of Interior leaders explaining topics from international development to remote sensing technologies.

Alongside environmental ideas, Wu, Leech, and Hamblin ask productive questions about the objects of Interior's environmental management. My book maintains that within a broader suite of natural resource agendas overseen by Interior, minerals were central. Minerals were an important and wide-ranging arena of activity in a period of intense industrialization and recurring warfare. Yet what counted as a "mineral" of priority was often a shifting target, including organic bases for fuel and fertilizers as well as metallic, base, and other minerals and elements. Leech situates the book in relation to a growing (if at times siloed) set of histories in energy and mining that can do more to showcase the interconnection of different kinds of extractable commodities. And indeed, there was a great interconnectedness among these materials that is evident across the Interior Department's activities, including those involving resource surveys to plan for materials needed for wartime manufacturing, industrial agriculture, and infrastructure projects that would support military and civilian needs. Wu extrapolates these extractive enterprises out even further, noting how they provided a way of reimagining the "possibilities of the frontier from the westward push to a vertical drive into the interior of the Earth itself." This framing so nicely captures a dynamic more implicit than carefully evaluated in the book—about verticality as a new plane of "expansionary energies."

If there were peculiarities to mining, there are also consonances with other land-use activities. Hamblin, for instance, notes how my account of Udall in the Middle East implies, unfairly, that desalination was not politically fraught compared to mineral interests. This is a fabulous point. My framing did set up a too tidy distinction between kinds of environmental management that harm and those that benefit. The reality is that virtually all forms of environmental management have unintended consequences, even harms. Some are far more visible and immediate than others. We know that dam-building, fisheries management, endangered species designations—and desalination in particular, as Hamblin rightly points out—have all been part of key geopolitical and economic calculations that have had their fair share of unanticipated problems.¹¹ What I hope to underline here is that, across the twentieth century, mining and its associated sins were politically legible; they resonated loudly among activist networks promoting an antiracist, anti-imperialist critique. I call minerals "sticky symbols" of imperialism—though perhaps the better word chemically and metaphorically would have been "durable" symbols. Other projects did not yet seem to have the same charge or trigger alarm as those nonrenewable

¹¹ For references to environmental fallout from dam-building, endangered species, and fisheries efforts, see Laura J. Martin, *Wild by Design: The Rise of Ecological Restoration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021). On desalination, see Elizabeth Hameeteman's dissertation "Pipe Parity: Desalination, Development, and the Global Quest for Water in the 1950s and 1960s," Boston University, 2020.

minerals that became associated with “blood” and “conflict,” an association officials sought to undermine by presenting them neutrally as “critical” and “strategic.”

Another arena of shared interest and curiosity among Leech, Stanford-McIntyre, and Hamblin involved the important question of agency within agencies—or how to think about the individuals within the institution of the Interior Department. For example, Leech observes that the book’s overall “broad brushstroke” approach allows some Interior personnel, such as Harold Ickes or Stewart Udall, to come into focus while others are crowded out. An unfortunate consequence is the effacement of bureaus nested within the Interior Department, including the US Geological Survey and Bureau of Mines. This observation calls to mind difficulty I had early in my research with locating agency among agents within Interior Department buildings and in the field. Ultimately, I relied on work from social scientists, including Mary Douglas and Daniel Carpenter, to theorize U.S. bureaucracy from individuals to agencies. Douglas maintained that individuals in institutions developed a shared thought style and faced disincentives for spurring radical change. Carpenter revealed how cabinet-level agencies such as the Interior Department could marshal the legitimacy and funding, relative to the broader federal bureaucracy, needed to galvanize vast and varied activities.¹²

There remain questions about “directionality and contingency” (Hamblin), as well as the intentionality of the choices calling forth different kinds of action across the organizational chart. It is true that internal division plagued agencies within Interior. For instance, the Geological Survey and Fish and Wildlife Service disagreed over best practices in coastal waters. But mezzo-level priorities in expansion and extraction often dictated the arc of departmental action. Hence, offshore drilling took precedence over marine life. Disparate agencies within Interior broadly cohered under the DOI seal on the letterhead—often though not exclusively in the direction of extractive priorities. Stanford-McIntyre queried the extent to which institutional empire-building was “accident or thoughtlessness.” I saw actors continually wrapped up in a kind of institutional thinking theorized by Douglas, which, in the case of the Interior Department, entailed baseline assumptions about the legitimacy of managing new frontiers, as the department had historically done. The benevolence of that mission seemed obvious. Individuals rarely examined the consequences of the Interior Department’s expansionism since its origins in the fever pitch of Manifest Destiny for different communities and different ecosystems. The obvious question from the early twenty-first century is one that few in the late-nineteenth or twentieth centuries asked: given Interior’s role furthering expansionist violence toward Native Americans, what actions might be taken to foster capacities for ensuring the social and environmental good for the many, while curtailing the capacities for expansionism and extractivism that so often cut against collective good?

¹² Mary Douglas, *How Institutions Think* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986); Daniel P. Carpenter, *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy: Reputations, Networks, and Policy Innovation in Executive Agencies, 1862-1928* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

Such counterfactuals dovetail with the kind of thoughtful line of questioning that Hamblin sets out in his analysis, as he invites a more sustained comparison between the Canadian Government's Interior Department and the United States' own. In the 1930s, the Canadian government abolished its own Interior Department on grounds that its task in settling territory was complete. Subsequently, the department's functions were either provincialized or split into separate departments, for instance, those oriented to Native Affairs on the one hand and to natural resource management on the other. The US Interior Department obviously lingered on, but there were moments of upheaval, including during the 1980s when the Ronald Reagan administration unleashed privatization schemes and defunded the department. Following Hamblin's provocation, we can note similarities, but also differences, in the 1930s Canadian case and 1980s US case. One *could* read Reagan and his zealous anti-government Interior Secretary, James G. Watt, as intervening, however unintentionally, in the cycle of expansion with their bid to disassemble the Interior Department. But the Reagan and Watt approach was not a deceleration of extractivism or expansionism; it was a shortcut to both. In the United States, where natural resource management and Indigenous Affairs remained under one departmental mandate, Watt was able to spearhead the *defunding* of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the *funding* of mineral exploration, in simultaneity. Some Native peoples had called for an end to Interior Department interference in their affairs. But Reagan's and Watt's approach eliminated funding that many Native communities used strategically to do reparative work in the form of housing, jobs, healthcare, and institution-building to create space for cultural revitalization. The resulting budget cuts were devastating, leading to spiking unemployment and poverty rates across reservations. In the end, what Reagan pushed for was the obliteration of government functions that placed a check on capitalist expansion (such as environmental regulations or recognizing tribal self-determination) and the amplification of government functions that could further capitalist expansion (such as mineral exploration or militarization).

Ultimately, the US Interior Department doggedly maintained an institutional coupling of natural resource management and Native Affairs, a linkage with longstanding ties to rationales for settler colonial dispossession. European settlers adopted a pernicious logic that viewed Indigenous people as "natural" beings fundamentally incapable of stewarding land properly and thus, like land itself, in need of management. Such rationales justified seizing Indigenous lands for a variety of ends, including the creation of National Parks that then excluded Indigenous rightsholders from traditional hunting and foraging grounds. What would untangling the knot of these confluences of natural resource management and Native Affairs make possible? Addressing their historical linkage might help open anticolonial horizons within an institution created to do the work of colonization.¹³ Indeed, such moves seem to be

¹³ Given Interior's origins and functions in settler society, officials working under its remit cannot enact a truly "decolonial" politics (though those outside the institution might). They can articulate an "anticolonial" vision that broadens the field of possibilities for sovereignty within the boundaries and

underway in an Interior Department headed for the first time by a Native American, Deb Haaland (Pueblo of Laguna). Haaland has worked to center history in novel ways, for instance, in the push to remove derogatory place names in federal lands, all of which are also Indigenous homelands.¹⁴ The department is grappling with the question of how to embolden Indigenous management of nonhuman nature on tribes' own terms. Renewed calls for returning land to tribes, elevating Traditional Ecological Knowledge, and codifying consent in the environmental review process all imagine paths forward in ways that might actively rewrite the terms of relationships between Indigenous peoples and nonhuman nature. Can the Interior Department also rewrite these relationships in dialogue with Indigenous rightsholders?

Such questions connect with an overall shared curiosity among the readers—one about where the “people” fit in a story told primarily from the perspective of “the planners.” All reviewers gesture to this important perspectival choice in different ways. Wu notes that a “power and weakness of the book” stems from such a “singular focus on the Interior Department” and its apparent successes. A final body chapter centered on the public-facing strategies of the Council of Energy Resource Tribes represented my attempt to get at a view beyond the planners. The coalition, which challenged the terms of Interior-led resource management, also calls attention to the multiple windows through which extractive events *could* have been viewed—perspectives as tantalizing as they are important. Wu’s point about collaborators and allies of the American state in places like the Philippines and Iran gets to the critical question of buy-in at the local level. It calls to mind one vignette I encountered that helps illuminate precisely the mixed reception Wu suggests: the memoir of William Warne. A former Assistant Interior Secretary with experience in both reclamation and Indigenous education reforms, Warne moved to Iran to lead the Country Mission in Truman’s Point Four program. Warne and other US officials did find some willing collaborators and partners in Tehran, and, as one might expect, his memoir devotes much space on the page to those individuals’ enthusiasm and gratitude for US benefactors. Yet Warne also begrudgingly acknowledged that there were many in Tehran who felt differently, espousing instead a “Yankee Go Home” mentality. One motion picture screening in Tehran revealed these popular discontents. A group of Iranian dissidents threw rocks at the motion picture wagons used to set up films to instruct locals on “modern” ways, films such as *Evolution of the Oil Industry*. People used minerals in ways that confounded Interior leaders. They used minerals *against* would-be modernizers. In short, local refusal accompanied local buy-in, and both mattered in the shaping of the more-than-human world.

I am all too aware of the limitations of the view angled toward state planners. The history of the Landsat satellite symbolized this difficulty—technicians made fateful

assumptions of settler society. See Max Liboiron, *Pollution is Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).

¹⁴ “Secretary Haaland Takes Action to Remove Derogatory Names from Federal Lands,” Press Releases, U.S. Department of the Interior, November 19, 2021, <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/secretary-haaland-takes-action-remove-derogatory-names-federal-lands>

choices about resolution and framing and, by extension, what came into focus and what fell from view. The resolution I chose is one that enabled certain actions to be seen and others to be blurred. There are omissions that accompany each observation. This is a challenge I will be taking up more in a forthcoming book on how some local communities debated multinational mining on their doorstep. In that project, I will continue to grapple with how to balance local and global, the plan and the people, the sweeping and the granular. And the comments of these incisive reviewers will be with me along the way.

About the Contributors

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